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Dayton NASTC conference draws large crowd

by Joanne Rumble, ASC Public Affairs

DAYTON, Ohio — Transforming air power through technology and innovation was the theme as some 800 research and acquisition professionals from the Air Force, industry and academia met this week at the Dayton Convention Center and Wright-Patterson AFB for the 2002 National Aeronautical Systems and Technology Conference.

Setting the stage for the conference's three dozen speakers, Gen. Lester L. Lyles, Air Force Materiel Command commander, emphasized the need for transforming the Air Force and the command — and his vision of that transformation. He addressed the need to reduce program development cycle times, use spiral development to incorporate new technologies and increased capabilities into weapon systems, eliminate programmatic surprises and coordinate the transformation now under way for sustainment programs.

Lyles said if he asked any of the major program directors in the audience what they were graded on, they would say they are graded on how well they executed their programs.

"And that's good," he said. "All of us who were program directors in the past ... learned to focus on our own programs. When you think about it in terms of effects and in terms of capabilities, and transformation and enterprise, we have to get away from that program-centric culture and mindset. We're trying to find ways now that we can also raise program directors — raise people in our organizations — to focus on creating the desired effect for the war fighter, to focus on creating and supporting the enterprise."

Lyles said the objective is to break people out of their "stovepipes" and to look at issues with a broader perspective.

"This is a different way of thinking," he said. "We don't normally teach people to do that. We're going to have to make that part of our teaching process as we go through our transformation."

Hosted by Aeronautical Systems Center Commander Lt. Gen.



Rich Garcia, public affairs chief for Air Force Research Laboratory's Directed Energy Directorate, talks about the modified Boeing 747-400F which will carry the Airborne Laser weapon system. The program is managed by Aeronautical Systems Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. (Air Force photo by Spencer P. Lane)

Dick Reynolds and Air Force Research Laboratory Commander Maj. Gen. Paul Nielsen, this was the third NASTC conference, part of a series of annual conferences designed to help Air Force and industry counterparts communicate about changes critical to the defense of the nation.

"This (conference) is all about exchanging information," Reynolds said. "The 'kill chain' for this week is information leading to knowledge which compels understanding that yields ideas for transformation. We have broken (attendance) records for the second year with about 800 people here. We have sold out our conference space."

Nielsen added, "The great turnout affords us an opportunity to demonstrate AFRL's transformational innovations to many of the key people in air and space technology. With an audience like this, we help influence both the focus of today's science and technology and the air and space innovations of tomorrow. This conference helps us achieve that goal by allowing us to share with our industry counterparts the technologies we want their help in developing."

A common thread of many of the briefings was Air Force

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and DOD emphasis on capability-based planning and acquisition — rather than platform-centric or weapon system-based planning to support the war fighter; emphasis on developments in information-, nano-, directed energy and bio-technologies; and changes in organizational structure to codify these approaches to transformation.

Retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Claude Bolton, now assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology, spoke about Army initiatives to reform that service's acquisition.

Bolton said the Army's transformation will be the service's "biggest change in the Army in 100 years." As part of his presentation, "Transforming the Way Soldiers Fight," Bolton spoke of linked systems talking and fighting together in a sphere moving around the battle space. He capped his briefing with a Hollywood-style video showing soldiers with hi-tech combat gear complete with voice-activated weapons.

Several speakers addressed the direction Air Force acquisition is taking with "enterprise management," a broader perspective for acquiring and managing systems, resulting in better systems at lower cost and increased fielded capability. The four enterprises are aeronautical, command and control, space and armament.

"Enterprise management is as much about how we think as it is about process and organization," Reynolds said. "We're used to thinking in stovepipes. Now we have to get out of those stovepipes. Cross-enterprise management is the key to delivering integrated war-winning capability."

Conference attendees also had the chance to catch up on the latest developments in many of the DOD weapons programs managed by industry, at more than 70 Air Force and industry exhibit booths. @